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The beard pullers in Romanesque art: an Islamic motif and its evolution in the West

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To the memory of Cesare Gnudi

Beards have always held a place of honor in human society.¹ First and foremost, they were considered a vital distinction between the daughters of Eve and the sons of Adam, indicating the latter's superiority. The statement made in this respect by Clement of Alexandria, one of the early Church Fathers, reflects an ancient tradition: «God intended woman to be smooth and silly, exalting naturally in her hair alone like a horse in its mane. But man he adorned with a beard like lions, making him masculine with a hairy chest, which is indeed a proof of strength and empire».² Throughout the Middle Ages attitudes in the West towards hair in general and beards in particular varied, both in the secular and the ecclesiastical worlds. Beards stood not only for manhood, age, strength and masculine beauty but also for spiritual values such as piety, holiness, wisdom, dignity and honor. A man held his beard while meditating, swore by it and may have been punished for insulting others by spitting on, or pulling their beards. Some argued that Adam had been created bearded; others asserted, as in the words of Byron, that «man for his sin has had a beard entailed upon his chin» while angels remained beardless; thus the beard was also considered an expression of sin and impurity.³ The controversy between those favouring beards and those opposing them is reflected in the *Apologia de Barbis*, a treatise attributed to Burchard, abbot of Bellevaux, who presumably composed it around 1160.⁴ Burchard's own ambiguous attitude towards beards may

be summed up as follows: while praising beards for *conversi*, he also stressed that beards might be misleading. Bad as well as good men have beards, «wisdom does not lie in a beard», and «for many men the beard is an instrument of pride, vanity and lust».⁵

In the West shaving beards became the dominant fashion among laymen in the middle of the eleventh century. This fashion presumably spread from Southern France to the north and from west to east. It prevailed throughout the twelfth century.⁶ On the other hand, beards were particularly valued in the Muslim world. The prophet Muḥammad himself set an example to Muslims in this as in other spheres of behaviour. This fact is clearly implied by a ḥadīth, a saying of the prophet revered in Islam as a major source of religious law and moral guidance: «The mustaches should be clipped close and the beards should be left abundant».⁷ This ḥadīth is illustrated in a story reported by al-Ṭabari, a Muslim scholar who lived in the ninth and early tenth century. When Persian ambassadors met Muḥammad, the prophet was surprised to see that they had shaved their beards and grew long mustaches. He therefore told them: «My Lord has ordered to clip the mustache and grow the beard».⁸ Up to this day the Muslims swear by Muḥammad's beard.

The contrast between the attitude prevailing towards beards in the West and the East in the eleventh and twelfth century is striking, as noticed in contem-

¹ See R. REYNOLDS, *Beards. An omnium gatherum*, London 1950.

² MIGNE, *Patrologia graeca*, VIII, coll. 580-581.

³ *Apologiae duae. Gozechini epistola ad Walcherum. Burchardi, ut videtur, abbatis Bellevalis Apologia de barbibus*, ed. by R.B.C. HUYGENS, with an introduction on beards in the Middle Ages by G. CONSTABLE, Turnholt 1984, *Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio medievalis*, LXII, pp. 56-85. - I wish to thank Professors Huygens and Constable for providing me with the manuscript of this book before its publication.

⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 130-140.

⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 124-130, 146-148.

⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 92-102.

⁷ See E.W. LANE, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 5, London 1874, s.v. AFW. On beards in Islam, see Muḥammad al-Ḥāmid, *Hukm al-liḥya fī al-Islām* [The Prescript on the Beard in Islam], Aleppo, n.d.

⁸ *Chronique de Abou-Djafar-Mo'hammed-ben-Djarir-ben-Yezid Tabari, traduite sur la version persane d'Abou-Ali-Mo'hammed Bel'A-mi*, par H. ZOTENBERG, Paris 1867-1874, II, pp. 326-327.

porary Western, Byzantine, Armenian and Muslim sources. According to William of Tyre, the great historian of the crusader East who wrote in the second half of the twelfth century, «it is customary among peoples in the East, both Greeks and other nations, to grow their beards with great care and total solicitude and to consider it a very great shame and irrevocable ignominy to have one hair pulled from the beard with injury». This statement appears in connection with an amusing story illustrating the importance of beards in the East. In 1109 the Armenian Gabriel of Malatia was horrified when his son-in-law Baldwin of Edessa, a Westerner who exceptionally grew a beard, claimed that he had sworn to cut it off should his knights not be paid. Gabriel therefore hastened to provide him the money he needed in order to prevent so dreadful an humiliation. He also exacted from Baldwin an oath that he would never again pledge his beard.⁹ In the last decade of the twelfth century Armenians objecting to the reforms introduced by the future King Leo II of Cilician Armenia told him: «Do

not leave your head baren like the Latin princes and kings [...], but cover yourself like your ancestors; let your hair and beard grow like them».¹⁰ When, during the siege of Antioch in 1098, the Crusaders put off shaving and began to grow beards, the bishop of Le Puy urged them to shave, fearing that they might be confused in battle with the Muslims «owing to the likeness of their beards».¹¹ In 1105 bishop Serlo of Séez condemned laymen who grew beards «for fear that if they shaved, the short bristles might prick the faces of their mistresses when they were kissing them». Therefore they «are so hairy that they look like Turks rather than Christians».¹² It is highly significant that

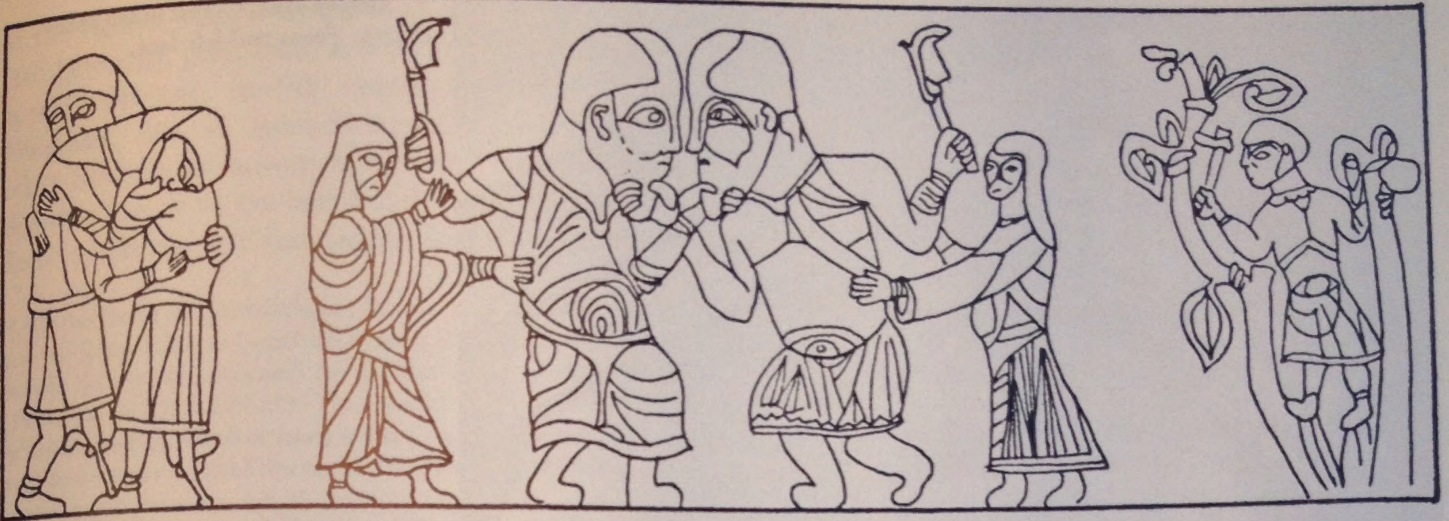
⁹ WILLIAM OF TYRE, *Historia*, XI, 11, in *Recueil des historiens des Croisades*. (R.H.C.). *Historiens occidentaux*, I, pp. 470-471; WILLIAM OF TYRE, *A history of deeds done beyond the Sea*, transl. E. Babcock and A.C. Krey («Records of Civilization», 35), New York 1943, I, pp. 479-480.

¹⁰ R.H.C., *Documents arméniens*, I, p. 597; see also p. 599.

¹¹ GUIBERT OF NOGENT, *Gesta Dei per Francos*, V, 6, in R.H.C., *Hist. occ.*, IV, p. 188.



1. Poitiers. Saint-Hilaire, capital. Front face. Poitiers, Archeological Museum.



2. Poitiers. Drawing of the capital from Saint-Hilaire, (reproduced from M. Sandoz).

in 1290 the Crusaders, who had come to the help of Acre, massacred Oriental Christians who wore beards, mistaking them for Muslims.¹³ Thus while in the East and especially in the Muslim world the growing of beards became and continuously remained a norm and code of behaviour, to laymen in the West it was a sheer matter of fashion.

It is rather surprising that in the eleventh and twelfth century West, in a society in which most laymen were beardless and were usually depicted as such in art, the motif of the beard pullers should have been so widespread. Isolated examples of this motif are to be found in Ireland, England,¹⁴ Germany,¹⁵ Austria,¹⁶ Spain,¹⁷ Italy¹⁸ and even as far as Hungary,¹⁹ beginning in the late eighth through the early thirteenth century. Yet the largest group and most elaborate examples of beard pullers are to be

found on French Romanesque capitals. In this group, which will be at the focus of our attention, we may discern two major variants of the motif: the first one presents a narrative theme with what seems a clear Christian message, whereas the second one is more limited in scope and bears a decisively ornamental character.

The earliest example of beard pullers, ascribed to the second half of the eleventh century, appears on a capital from the church of Saint-Hilaire-le-Grand at Poitiers [1-2].²⁰ Two bald men adorn its main side. The upper part of their faces, carefully delineated, bears a mask-like character. They wear short pleated skirts and confront each other in a rather unfriendly way: each man pulls his opponent's beard while threatening him with a lifted axe. They are flanked by two women trying to separate the rivals by holding

¹² *The ecclesiastical history of Orderic Vitalis*, XI, 11, ed. and transl. M. CHIBNALL, Oxford 1969-1980, VI, pp. 64, 66, and for the translation, pp. 65, 67.

¹³ *Les gestes des Chiprois. Recueil de chroniques françaises écrites en Orient aux XIII^e et XIV^e siècles*, éd. G. RAYNAUD, Genève 1887, p. 238, par. 480.

¹⁴ For Ireland, see below, p. 74 ss. For England, see A. GARDNER, *English medieval sculpture*, Cambridge 1951, pp. 72-73 and fig. 68: a capital in the choir of Romsey Abbey.

¹⁵ *Rhein und Maas. Kunst und Kultur, 800-1400*, Köln 1972-1973, II, p. 401, fig. 14: a mid-twelfth century capital from the monastery of St. Michael in Siegburg; R. KAUTZSCH, *Der Dom zu Worms*, Berlin 1938, pl. V.1, 36d; R. HAMANN, *Südfranzösische Protorennaissance und ihre Ausbreitung in Deutschland*, 1922, fig. 207: capital from the early thirteenth century in the choir of Bamberg cathedral depicting two couples of beard pullers; R. BUDDE, *Deutsche romanische Skulptur (1050-1250)*, München

1979, fig. 218: Gelnhausen, formerly church of St. Mary, corbel of the choir arcade after 1240.

¹⁶ F. NOVOTNY, *Romanische Bauplastik in Österreich*, Wien 1930, fig. 36: a corbel of St. Stephan cathedral in Vienna; *ibid.*, fig. 12: window on the north side of the apse at Schöngrabern.

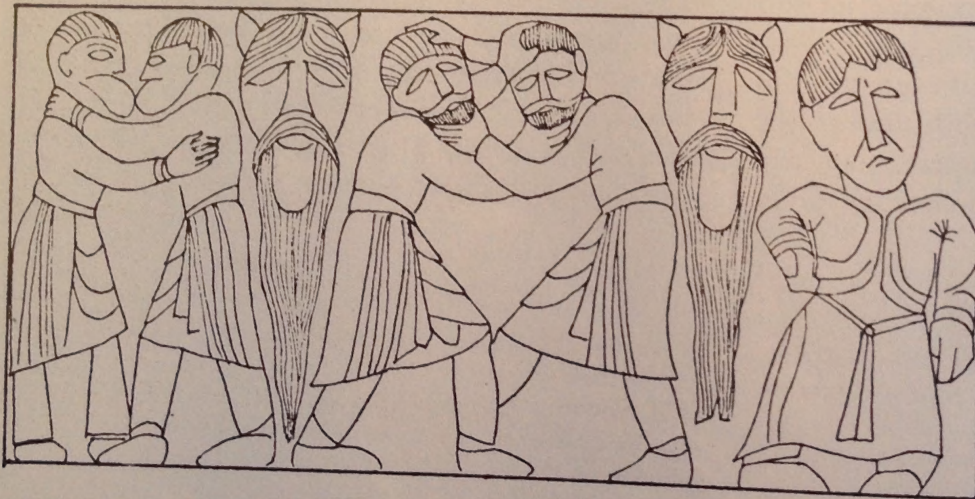
¹⁷ See below, p. 77

¹⁸ G. DE FRANCOVICH, *Benedetto Antelami, architetto e scultore, e l'arte del suo tempo*, Milano-Firenze 1952, I, pp. 338-339, tav. 328, fig. 536: basis of a column on the façade of Genoa cathedral; C. VERZÁR BORNSTEIN, *The capitals of the porch of Sant'Eufemia in Piacenza: interacting schools of Romanesque sculpture in Northern Italy*, «Gesta», XIII (1974), p. 24, fig. 20.

¹⁹ V. GERVERS, *The Romanesque church of Karcsa*, «Gesta», VII (1968), pp. 36-47, esp. fig. 15; E. RÉVHELYI, *L'église de Vértesszentkereszt et ses rapports avec l'architecture hongroise de l'époque arpadienne*, «Acta Historiae Artium», V (1958), pp. 52-56, figs. 11-12. Both capitals are from the early thirteenth century.



3. Anzy-le-Duc. Capital in the abbey church. Front and left face.



4. Anzy-le-Duc. Drawing of the capital in the abbey church.

the latter's garments as well as their lifted arms. The result of this unfortunate encounter is depicted on the left face of the capital: each of the rivals is now left with a wooden leg, and after the struggle they embrace. A boy standing between the branches of a tree and watching the wrestlers is depicted on the right face of the capital. The axe he holds, different in shape from those used by the wrestlers, is obviously a peaceful, agricultural tool.

We encounter similar scenes in Burgundy and the neighbouring Nivernais. The closest to the one at Poitiers is depicted on a late eleventh century capital in the abbey church of Anzy-le-Duc in Burgundy [3-4].²¹ The rivals pull each other's beards and forelock. The embrace is depicted on the left, as in Poitiers, while a crippled monk appears on the right side. The corners of the capital are adorned with two monstrous, bearded masks. The pleated short skirts

of the figures, similar to those of Poitiers, are depicted here with great care. A shift in the composition appears on two twelfth century capitals of the Nivernais, one in Saint-Pierre-le-Moûtier and the other from Saint-Sauveur at Nevers.²² In Saint-Pierre-le-Moûtier [5-6] the beard and forelock pullers are depicted on the left face, while the embrace adorns

²⁰ For the dating of the church, see M.-TH. CAMUS, *La reconstruction de Saint-Hilaire-le-Grand de Poitiers à l'époque romane. La marche des travaux*, «Cahiers de civilisation médiévale», XXV (1982), pp. 101-120, 239-271. The so-called "capital of the dispute" has been mentioned in many studies on Romanesque sculpture. For the most detailed description and analysis, including photographs and drawings, see M. SANDOZ, *Le chapiteau de la dispute du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Poitiers*, «Dibutade», VII (1960), Fascicule spécial du Bulletin des amis des Musées de Poitiers, (supplément au n° 33, oct.-déc. 1959), pp. 11-33. - The drawings illustrating the present study have been inserted for two reasons:

5. Saint-Pierre-le-Moûtier. Capital. Left and front face.



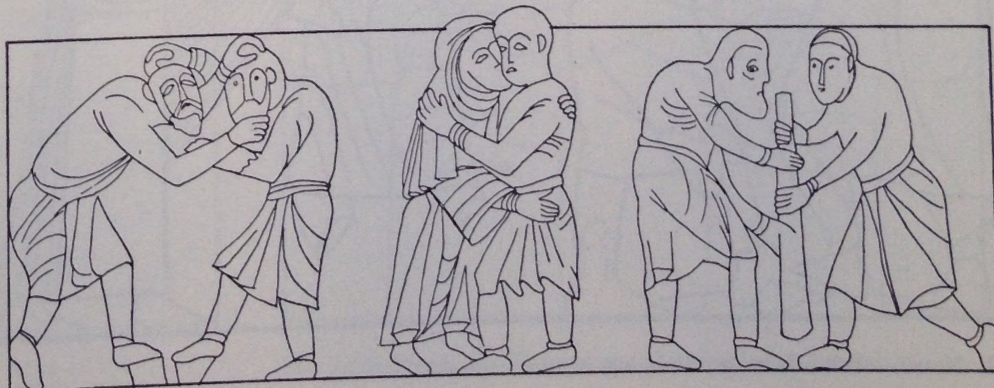
the center of the capital. The embracing figures are a man and a woman. The right face of this capital is decorated with two men wrestling for the mastery of a staff they both hold. It should be noted that each of the beard pullers at Saint-Pierre-le-Moûtier wears one high-heeled shoe. A similar composition appears on the unfinished Saint-Sauveur capital at Nevers

first, in certain cases it has been impossible to obtain adequate photographs of the sculpture; secondly, some drawings enable to follow more easily the sequence of the scenes deployed on the faces of the capitals.

²¹ For the dating of this church, see B. RUPPRECHT, *Romanische Skulptur in Frankreich*, München 1975, p. 105. The capital depicting the beard pullers is situated at the crossing of the church and was presumably carved in the late eleventh century.

²² For these examples, see M. ANFRAY, *L'architecture religieuse du Nivernais au moyen âge. Les églises romanes*, Paris 1951, pp. 273-274.

6. Saint-Pierre-le-Moûtier. Drawing of the capital.





7. Nevers. Capital from Saint-Sauveur. Left face. Nevers, Archeological Museum.

[7-8]. Next to the wrestlers we again find an embracing couple. The right face of this capital is adorned with a seated figure whose occupation cannot be determined.

So far we have dealt with capitals that include scenes of wrestling and reconciliation. While the fighters stand for the vice *Discordia*, the embracing figures represent its opposite, the virtue *Concordia*.²³ Two examples of elaborate combat scenes from early twelfth century France appear without a complementary, opposed scene. In the church of the Holy Cross at La Charité-sur-Loire scenes depicting wrestlers are deployed on two adjacent capitals situated at one of the corners of the crossing.²⁴ On one of these capitals two men pull each other's beard and forelock, while a third figure watches the wrestlers. The second capital portrays two men threatening each other with axes, while two additional figures look at them. It is interesting to note that the two activities, which appear separately at la Charité, are concentrated in a single scene on the capital of Poitiers. No other example of two fighting scenes appears on a capital in the abbey church of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire [9].²⁵ On the right side two men pull each

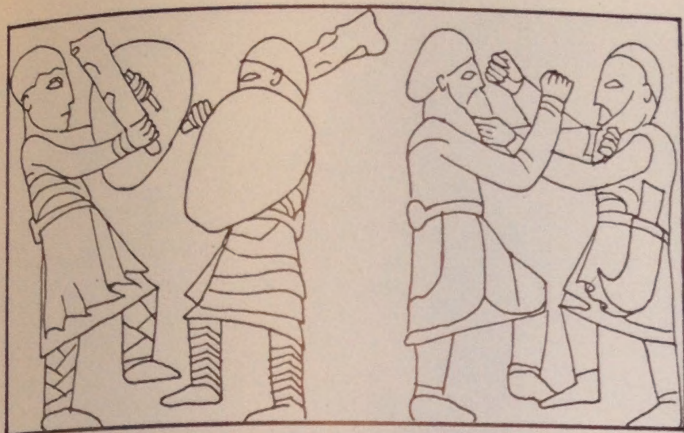
²³ See A. KATZENELLENBOGEN, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Mediaeval art*, New York 1964, p. 59, n. 3.

²⁴ It is difficult to discern the scenes depicted on these capitals because of the height at which they are inserted. They have never been photographed; for their detailed description, see ANFRAY, *L'architecture*, p. 273.

²⁵ Photo Austin, XL 10.



8. Nevers. Saint-Sauveur, drawing of the capital.



9. Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire. Drawing of a capital in the abbey church.



10. Saint-Pierre-de-l'Île. Corbel in the church.

other's beard while lifting their fists in a threatening gesture. One of these men has a wide, curved sword attached to his belt. The neighbouring wrestlers hold shields and threaten each other with clubs. Both couples wear short pleated skirts opening in the middle, as in the previously discussed examples. The sword and shields may indicate that the figures engaged in combat are warriors. It is interesting to point in this context to a corbel at Saint-Pierre-de-l'Île, on which two bearded men wearing a similar garment fight each other with shields and clubs [10]. The last examples include fighting scenes only. They lead us to the second group mentioned above, which we have defined as basically ornamental.

Our analysis of the beard pullers motif, mainly on French Romanesque capitals, suggests that it first appeared in the framework of a narrative theme with an obvious moral message. Simultaneously or somewhat later, sculptors may have borrowed from this cycle one component, the fierce combat, which became one of their favourite grotesque and orna-

mental devices.²⁶ The numbers of these representations is too large to be mentioned here in full. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the playful, inventive and imaginative spirit of these artists at its best. Condensed on small capitals such as the one at Saint-Antonin in the Languedoc [11],²⁷ the rivals appear pulling beard and hair; in another version, as in Saint-Pierre de Tourtoirac [12] and Saint-Raphaël d'Excideuil [13], both in the Périgueux,²⁸ the beard is parted in the middle so as to enable a couple or a

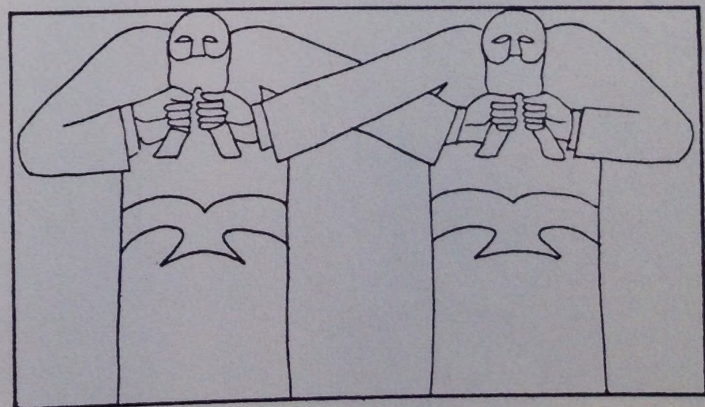
²⁶ It is not impossible, however, that scenes of beard pulling depicted separately and used as ornamental devices or as expressions of aggression were independently invented by Romanesque artists and did not derive from the "semi-narrative" cycle. Such may well be the case with the many depictions of bearded heads or masks of figures pulling the two halves of their own beard or those of their neighbours: see e.g. below, p. 73 and fig. 19.

²⁷ J. BALTRUŠAITIS, *La stylistique ornementale dans la sculpture romane*, Paris 1931, p. 173, fig. 479.

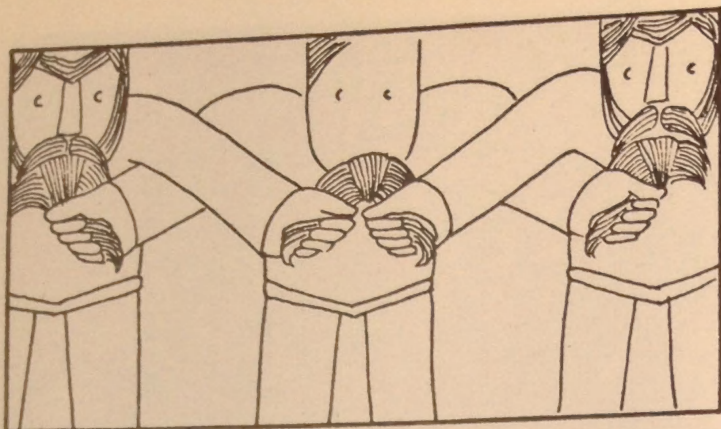
²⁸ B. STODDARD, *The Romanesque sculpture from the church of St. Raphaël près d'Excideuil (Dordogne)*, «Gesta», X (1971) 1, p. 33, figs. 5-6.



11. Saint-Antonin. Drawing of a capital.



12. Saint-Pierre de Tourtoirac. Drawing of a capital.



13. Saint-Raphaël d'Excideuil. Drawing of a capital.

trio to pull each other's as well as the individuals' own half-beard. Two figures share one head, each pulling his own half-beard, at Saint-Jouin-de-Marnes (Deux-Sèvres) and Parçay-sur-Vienne (Indre-et-Loire),²⁹ San Juan de las Abadesas in Catalonia [14] and Santo Domingo de Silos in Castilla [15].³⁰ A fierce aggression is displayed on two other capitals, one in La Sauve-Majeure [16] and the other from the church of Aubiac [17],³¹ both in the Gironde. One or two adversaries have been defeated by beard or forelock pulling. While overturned with head down and feet up, they still hold on to their rival's beard as a last resort. On a corbel from La Sauve-Majeure, the beard pullers, completely intertwined, are repres-



15. Santo Domingo de Silos. Capital



16. La Sauve-Majeure. Capital.



14. San Juan de las Abadesas. Capital.

²⁹ Archives photographiques du Centre Médiéval de Poitiers, clichés XXVIII-95 and IV-435.

³⁰ J. GUDIOL RICART - J.A. GAYA NUÑO, *Arquitectura y escultura románicas* («Ars Hispaniae» V), Madrid 1948, fig. 65; J. PÉREZ DE URBEL, *El claustro de Silos*, Burgos 1975, p. 176.

³¹ See W. CAHN, L. SEIDEL, *Romanesque sculpture in American collections*, New York 1979, I, pp. 62-63.



17. Church of Aubiac. Drawing of a capital in Williamstown, Mass., Williams College, Lawrence Art Museum.



19. Church of Sebastia. Corbel.



18. La Sauve-Majeure. Corbel. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Cloisters.

ented with a grotesque expression on their faces [18]. Another twelfth century corbel displaying a man pulling his own beard was carved by a French artist in the Holy Land for the church of Saint John at Sebastia [19].³²

The examination of the various components of the

beard pullers motif leads to some important conclusions. Elements such as those common to Poitiers and La Charité where beard pulling, threatening with axes and accompanying figures appear, may point to a similar model for these capitals. Variations in detail and composition in the other versions either point to different models or stem from the inventive spirit of the Romanesque artists. The basic question we face here, however, is where the beard pullers motif originated and through which intermediaries it reached Romanesque sculpture. The components and variants of the narrative theme may provide us with some important clues to this effect.

Two such components are to be found in a late eleventh and a twelfth century illuminated manuscript. A copy of the Commentary on the Apocalypse of Saint John by Beatus of Liébana was executed and illustrated at Saint-Sever in Gascony between 1028 and 1072 or possibly 1061.³³ One of its miniatures, enclosed in a rectangular frame, displays two bald

³² See C. ENLART, *Les monuments des croisés dans le royaume latin de Jérusalem. Architecture religieuse et civile*, Paris 1925-1928, II, p. 344, and Atlas, II, pl. 148, fig. 470.

³³ On this manuscript, see W. NEUSS, *Die Apokalypse des Hl. Johannes in der altspanischen und altchristlichen Bibel-Illustration (Das Problem der Beatus-Handschriften)*, Münster in Westfalen 1931, I, pp. 34-37; M. SCHAPIRO, review of Ph. Lauer, *Les enluminures romanes des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris 1927, «Art Bulletin» X (1927-28), pp. 398-399; D. MINER, review of



20. Miniature from the Saint-Sever Beatus Commentary on the Apocalypse (Paris, B.N. lat. 8878).

men, one wearing a short garment, the other a long one. They pull each other's beards while a woman watches the scene. Under this miniature we find the following inscription: *Frontibus attritis barbas con-scindere fas est*³⁴ and, in translation, «It is legitimate to tear beards while rubbing foreheads» [20]. The ironic twist of the saying is obvious. The scene, of a secular character, is clearly out of context.³⁵ The same holds true of a miniature in another manuscript of Beatus' commentary on the Apocalypse, completed at Silos in 1109.³⁶ It depicts a musician and a knife-dancer both wearing short pleated skirts and high-heeled shoes [21]. It has been argued that the Saint-Sever manuscript is markedly different in style from the earlier Mozarabic copies of the Beatus commentary executed in Spain since the tenth century, and that several of its religious motifs and depictions cannot be clearly related to a specific school or tradi-

Neuss' book on the basis of Schapiro's unpublished doctoral thesis, «Art Bulletin», XV (1933), pp. 388-391; p. 311 and pp. 322-323, n. 40, 43 and 45. On specific miniatures in this manuscript, see O.K. WERCKMEISTER, *Pain and death in the Beatus of Saint-Sever*, «Studi medievali», 3^a s., XIV (1973), pp. 565-626, and for the dating, *ibid.*, p. 568 and n. 14.

³⁴ See É. MÂLE, *L'art religieux du XII^e siècle en France*, Paris 1928, p. 15.

³⁵ SCHAPIRO, *Two Romanesque drawings in Auxerre and some iconographic Problems*, in *Id.*, *Romanesque art*, New York 1977, p. 323, n. 43, mentions another miniature from Saint-Maurin (Paris, Bibl. Nat., ms. lat. 2819, fol. 87, from ca. 1100), claiming that it depicts beard pullers similar to those in the Saint-Sever Beatus. It should be noted, however, that the scene in the Saint-Maurin manuscript is quite different: two bearded men stand on the right while the latter pulls the other man's beard; both men have one hand immersed in the basin. The meaning of this scene remains unsolved, yet it clearly does not belong to the motif of the beard pullers discussed here.

tion.³⁷ It is most likely, however, that the secular scenes just referred to both derive from Mozarabic models that have not come down to us. This hypothesis is strongly suggested by their comparison, especially that of the beard pulling scene of Saint-Sever, with similar scenes adorning various Muslim objects. In this context, particular attention should be paid to a marble basin, a unique work of Spanish Islamic sculpture that survives at Játiva in the province of Valencia.

It is impossible to determine the precise dating and function of this basin. It may have been executed in the eleventh or twelfth century, at any rate before the middle of the thirteenth century when the region

³⁶ See NEUSS, *Die Apokalypse*, I, pp. 38-39, and SCHAPIRO, *From Mozarabic to Romanesque in Silos*, in *Id.*, *Romanesque art*, pp. 42-47.

³⁷ See above, n. 33, and for Mozarabic copies, P.K. KLEIN, *Der ältere Beatus-Kodex Vitr. 14-1 der Biblioteca Nacional zu Madrid. Studien zur Beatus-Illustration und der spanischen Buchmalerei des 10. Jahrhunderts*, Hildesheim-New York 1976. - I am not concerned here with style.



21. Miniature from the Silos Beatus Commentary on the Apocalypse (London, B.M. Add. ms. 11695).



22. Játiva, Museo Municipal. Marble basin. Front face, detail.

of Valencia was conquered by Christian forces. It is adorned on its four sides with subjects already appearing in Spanish Ummayyad art.³⁸ One of its longitudinal faces displays scenes of outdoor entertainment [22]. On the left figures recline under a tree, one of them leisurely fondling his beard, while servants offer drinks and musicians play the lute. In the middle, within a roundel, another figure is being served a drink by a servant. Following to the right are two wrestling scenes. In the first one three men wearing short pleated skirts are engaged in a mock combat, fighting each other with long staves while pulling each other's beard [23]. It is noteworthy that they wear a headgear with an indented upper edge.

The fighters are flanked by two musicians, one playing a drum and the other blowing a horn, who convey the lively and playful atmosphere of the event. A different beard pulling scene, this time inserted in a roundel, is represented to the extreme right [24]. Two bald men wearing short pleated skirts with trousers underneath pull each other's beard. It

³⁸ See E. BAER, *The 'Pilá' of Játiva. A document of secular urban art in Western Islam*, «Kunst des Orients», VII, 2, pp. 144-166, figs. 1-17. In dating the basin to the eleventh century the author has considered the beginning of the Reconquista a *terminus ad quem* for the execution of the "pilá", while overlooking the fact that Játiva in the province of Valencia was conquered much later.



23. Játiva. Marble basin. Front face, detail.



24. Játiva. Marble basin. Front face, detail.

seems as though the contest is over, since each of them holds a bag which may well contain the prize they won.³⁹ The scenes adorning the Játiva basin are of utmost importance for the study of the nature and possible sources of the beard pullers' motif in Romanesque art. The two contests represented on the Játiva basin bear a distinctively secular character. They illustrate the entertainment, accompanied by drinking and music, typical of Muslim courts for centuries. As we shall soon see, this form of pastime originated in Sasanian Iran and spread to other countries in the first centuries of Islam.⁴⁰ We have already noted that beards were revered in Islamic society. It is not surprising, however, that in daily life they also become an object of aggression

and wit. Beard pulling occurred in actual combat as well as in mock battles in the framework of entertainment, a social sublimation of sheer brutal force like the tournament in western feudal society. The continuity and popularity of the beard pullers motif in Islam as well as its "Persian connection" are attested both in literature and in the visual arts. Beard pulling in the framework of combat and dispute is portrayed in early Arabic literature. A description of two old men pulling each other's beard appears among scenes from daily life included in a work composed in 832 in Southern Arabia.⁴¹ A Persian work written in the ninth century embodying ancient traditions describes the adventures of Adam and Eve as well as their descendants. According to one of the

³⁹ For a detailed description of these wrestlers, see *ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

⁴⁰ See M. ROSEN-AYALON, *Themes of Sasanian origin in Islamic art*, «Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam», IV (1984), pp. 69-80.

⁴¹ 'ABD AL-MALIK B. HISHĀM, *Kitāb al-Tidjān fī Mulūk Ḥimyar*, Hyderabad-Deccan 1347 H., p. 218. - I wish to thank Professor J. Kister of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem for providing me with this text.

stories devils aroused envy in the latter, who pulled each other's beards.⁴² Episodes describing humiliation and killing by beard pulling appear as often as twenty times in the *Shāhnāma* or *Book of Kings*, the Persian epos composed in the late tenth century by Firdawsī, who based his poem on an earlier prose version.⁴³ A sizable body of Persian humoristic literature down to the fourteenth century deals with beards.⁴⁴ It is significant to note in this context the difference in "hair style" between western and Muslim entertainers. In describing the marriage of King Robert II of France to Constance around 1002 Ralph Glaber stated that men from the South were «stripped of hair from the middle of the head, shaved of beards in the manner of jugglers».⁴⁵ An unidentified Muslim author presents quite a different picture:

«Did I not tell you that a buffon is at his wittiest when his beard is long? Therefore, do not trim your beard. And God knows better».⁴⁶

No early Islamic representations of entertainment with beard pulling have survived. Some Western works of art, however, may hint at their existence and nature. The earliest examples appear in the Book of Kells, executed around the year 800, in which beard pullers adorn an initial.⁴⁷ The same motif is portrayed on the late ninth or early tenth century Irish Cross of Muiredach at Monasterboice [25]⁴⁸ and in an initial in the Corbie Psalter from Amiens [26], an early ninth century Carolingian manuscript.⁴⁹ Some scholars have argued that the motif on these Irish and Carolingian works derives from Sasanian models.⁵⁰ Yet in view of their dating

⁴² *Bundahishn*, ed. T.D. ANKLESARIA, Bombay 1908, p. 104.

⁴³ FIRDAWSĪ, *Shāhnāma*, ed. M. Dabīr-Siyākī, Tehran 1335 H., e.g. p. 333, l. 1139; p. 585, l. 2610; p. 760, l. 1871.

⁴⁴ E.g.A. BAUSANI, *Il 'Libro della barba' di 'Obeid Zākānī*, in A. Francesco Gabrieli, *Studi orientalistici offerti nel sessantesimo compleanno dai suoi colleghi e discepoli* («Università di Roma, Studi orientali pubblicati a cura della Scuola Orientale», 5), Roma 1964, pp. 1-19; see also F. ROSENTHAL, *Humor in Early Islam*, Leiden 1956, pp. 56, 61, 79, 84, 94.

⁴⁵ *Apologiae duae*, p. 93, n. 217.

⁴⁶ ROSENTHAL, *Humor*, p. 62.

⁴⁷ *The Book of Kells, Reproduction from the manuscript in Trinity College Dublin, with a study of the manuscript by* FRANÇOISE HENRY, London 1976, photo 61. Three sets of beard-pullers are

depicted on the upper right-hand portion of fol. 188. - I wish to thank Dr. P. Harbison for drawing my attention to this example.

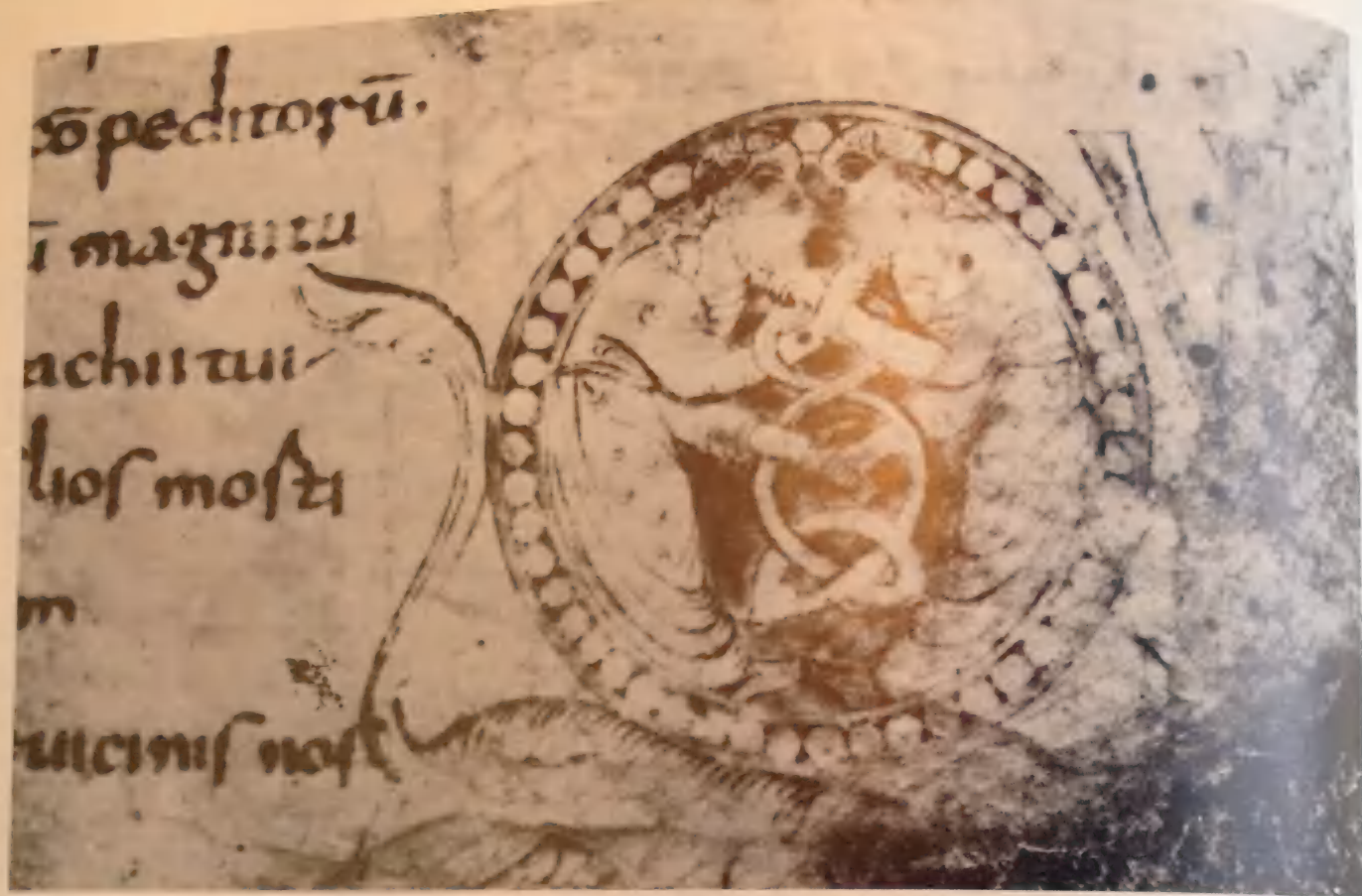
⁴⁸ F. HENRY, *Irish art during the Viking invasions (800-1020 A.D.)*, London 1967, pp. 138-139 for the dating, and pl. 77; A.K. PORTER, *Spanish Romanesque sculpture*, New York 1929, I, p. 9, suggests that the Muiredach Cross beard pullers influenced the eleventh century example in the Beatus of Saint-Sever.

⁴⁹ J. PORCHER, *Aux origines de la lettre ornée médiévale*, in *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant*, Paris 1964, V, pp. 273-274.

⁵⁰ See J. PORCHER, *L'Évangélaire de Charlemagne et le Psautier d'Amiens*, «La Revue des Arts Musées de France», VII (1957), pp. 51-58; ID., *La peinture provinciale (régions occidentales)*, in *Karl der Große. Lebenswerk und Nachleben. III. Karolingische Kunst*, ed. W. Braunfels and H. Schnitzler, Düsseldorf 1965, pp. 59-61.



25. Monasterboice. Muiredach Cross, detail.



26. Miniature from the Psalter of Corbie. Detail (Amiens, Bibl. de la Ville, ms. 18, fol. 73r).

it is not excluded that they were borrowed from early Persian Islamic art. An early tenth century representation of beard pulling from Armenia is indeed directly related to Islamic Persia. The upper frieze of the church of the Holy Cross at Aght'amar presents scenes of entertainment, two of which with wrestlers; one of them depicts hair pulling, the other displays a man pulling his adversary's beard while the latter threatens him with a staff [27]. Both in style and iconography this frieze bears a definite Persian imprint.⁵¹

It has already been mentioned that Muslim court entertainment perpetuated that of Sasanian Iran. Similarly, depictions of banqueting and hunting in Islamic art were directly inspired by Sasanian

models.⁵² A continuous tradition of such entertainment scenes is reflected on portable Islamic objects, such as ivory caskets, metalwork and ceramics. Seated figures, obviously the host and his guests, attended by servants are often represented as drinking while watching performances of jousting, wrestling and various forms of acrobatic exercise as well as acting and dancing accompanied by musicians.⁵³ The famous Pamplona ivory casket carved in the early eleventh century is representative of Spanish Islamic ivories.⁵⁴ It is decorated with scenes of ceremonial outdoor feasting framed by medallions. A pair of wrestlers is depicted on a western Islamic ivory pyxis from the eleventh century.⁵⁵ Wrestling and mock fighting appear on two eleventh century luster plates

⁵¹ See S. DER NERSESSIAN, *Aght'amar, church of the Holy Cross*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1965, pp. 25, 50-53; as for the links between Armenia and Iran, see also D. TALBOT-RICE, *Persian elements in the arts of the neighbouring countries*, «Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society», XXIV (1937), reprinted in *Id.*, *Byzantine Art and its Influences*, London 1973, XVII, pp. 385-396.

⁵² See above p. 76.

⁵³ R. ETTINGHAUSEN, *The dance with zoomorphic masks and other forms of entertainment seen in Islamic art*, in *Arabic and Islamic studies in honor of Hamilton A.R. Gibb*, ed. G. Makdisi, Leiden 1965, pp. 211-224.

⁵⁴ J. BECKWITH, *Caskets from Cordoba*, London 1960, pl. 23-24, now in the cathedral of Pamplona.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pl. 14-17. A similar pair of wrestlers representing *pahlavān*



27. Aght'amar. Church of the Holy Cross, Upper frieze. Detail (drawing).

from Fatimid Egypt, now in Cairo. On one of them the bearded wrestlers watched by an audience are engaged in a "test of strength", as mentioned by the in-

vāns in their leather trunks is depicted on a Persian luster star-tile from ca. 1400: see G.D. GUEST, R. ETTINGHAUSEN, *The iconography of a Kashān luster plate*, «Ars Orientalis», IV (1961), p. 58, and pl. 22, fig. 71, now in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore.

⁵⁶ See ETTINGHAUSEN, *The dance*, pp. 221-222, pl. XVIII.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222, pl. XX.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 222-223.

scription appearing to the left of the referee.⁵⁶ On the other plate two bearded men holding shields fight with staves [28],⁵⁷ a form of fencing which is still popular in Egypt.⁵⁸

Islamic metal objects present a rich cycle of entertainment scenes, including numerous depictions of wrestling. On the well known Persian Bobrinski "kettle" of 1163 we find the seated host, the drinking guests, as well as contests with staves.⁵⁹ Similar scenes appear on inlaid brasses of the first half of the thirteenth century.⁶⁰ The technique, composition and iconography of Islamic ivory and metal objects are reflected in the linear style of the carving, as well as the insertion within medallions of beard pulling scenes on the previously examined marble basin of Játiva.

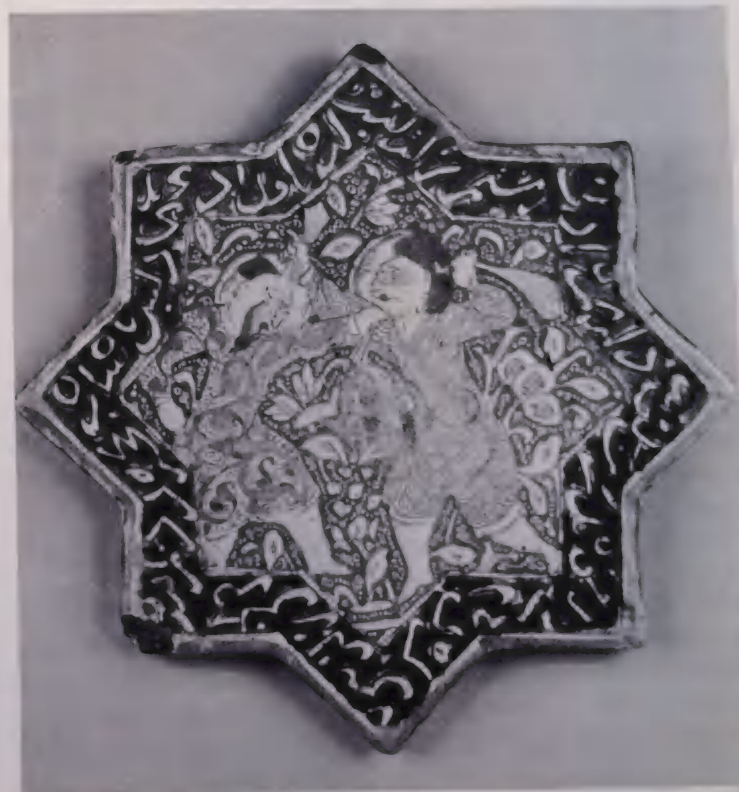
The tradition of depicting entertainment scenes is perfectly illustrated by a Persian star-tile assigned to the early fourteenth century, now at the Walters Art

⁵⁹ R. ETTINGHAUSEN, *The Bobrinski 'kettle': patron and style of an Islamic bronze*, «Gazette des Beaux-Arts», XXIV (1943), pp. 193-208; for the wrestlers, see *ibid.*, fig. 1.

⁶⁰ D.S. RICE, *Inlaid brasses from the workshop of Aḥmad al-Dhakī al-Mawsilī*, «Ars Orientalis», XI (1957), pp. 283-326, and esp. 287-301. Fig. 33a on p. 308 represents wrestlers rather than acrobats.



28. Luster plate. Cairo, Museum of Islamic Art.



29. Persian star-tile. Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery.

Gallery in Baltimore.⁶¹ Although somewhat late for our purposes, this tile is of particular interest since, in addition to a scene of wrestling with beard pulling, it also bears an inscription mentioning Rustam, one of the heroes of the Persian *Book of Kings* [29].⁶² We have seen that this epos includes numerous episodes of combat involving beard pulling. In one of these Rustam kills his adversary by plucking out his beard.⁶³ The Baltimore tile was obviously part of a whole set of interlocking tiles representing episodes of the Persian *Book of Kings* on the walls of a sumptuous residence.⁶⁴ The possible existence of similar early thirteenth century *Shāhnāma* cycles is hinted by a beaker of this period, presently at the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, representing scenes of the same epos.⁶⁵ A star-tile with arabesque decoration inscribed with the first lines of this book also illustrates its popularity in the second half of the thirteenth century.⁶⁶ On the Baltimore tile, however, the beard and forelock pullers, one of whom also threatens his rival with a club, seem to be performers judging by the masks they wear. We may assume that the artist who painted this piece used a model depicting an entertainment scene for the portrayal of an actual combat. As already mentioned before, theatre scenes belonged to the repertory of Islamic court entertainment. This is also confirmed by a twelfth century Persian plate adorned with a running bearded figure wearing a pointed hat [30].⁶⁷ This black figure, shown in silhouette, was undoubtedly inspired by Islamic shadow-plays.⁶⁸

The objects examined above illustrate the close link existing between the twin traditions of literary and visual representations in Islamic culture. It is easy to envisage the setting and atmosphere of Islamic courtly residences witnessing a continuous interac-



30. Persian plate. Oxford, Museum of Eastern Art.

tion between daily life, recollections of the past, and various artistic media. Literary works such as the *Shāhnāma* were occasionally represented in painting accompanied by inscriptions in manuscripts as well as on walls; entertainment scenes were depicted in numerous versions on portable objects in daily use in these residences; and a sculptured basin such as that of Játiva, adorned with entertainment scenes, may have been situated in a garden where actual banquets took place. The convergence of literary and visual evidence through the centuries points to a continuous tradition of various types of Muslim entertainments. In thus appears justified to adduce later depictions to demonstrate the existence of such enter-

⁶¹ See G.D. GUEST, R. ETTINGHAUSEN, *The iconography*, p. 58, pl. 22, fig. 72. Although published, the scene depicted on this tile has never been discussed in the framework of the subject of beard pullers, nor has the inscription been previously deciphered.

⁶² Surprisingly, the episode mentioned in the inscription is not connected with fighting or beard pulling: «When he was satisfied with water, he made himself ready for the hunt. He girded his belt and filled his quiver with arrows»: *Shāhnāma*, ed. A.E. Bertel's, II, Moskva 1962, p. 94. The inscription should have most likely appeared on another tile of the same set, on which see below.

⁶³ FIRDAWŚI, ed. Dabīr-Siyāki (as in n. 43), *Shāhnāma*, p. 333. - I wish to express special thanks to Professor S. Shaked of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem for numerous references to Persian texts and for the transcription and translation of the unpublished

inscription on the star-tile.

⁶⁴ On such wall decoration, see A. LANE, *Early Islamic pottery. Mesopotamia, Egypt and Persia*, London 1947, pp. 39-40 and pl. 67.

⁶⁵ See E. ATIL, *Freer Gallery of Art. Fiftieth anniversary exhibition III. Ceramics from the world of Islam*, Washington, D.C., 1975, p. 101, no. 44, and illustration on p. 100.

⁶⁶ On this tile, see *The arts of Islam. Hayward Gallery (8 April - 4 July 1976)*, The Arts Council of Great-Britain, London 1976, p. 258, no. 384.

⁶⁷ LANE, *Early Islamic pottery*, pp. 35-36 and fig. 49.

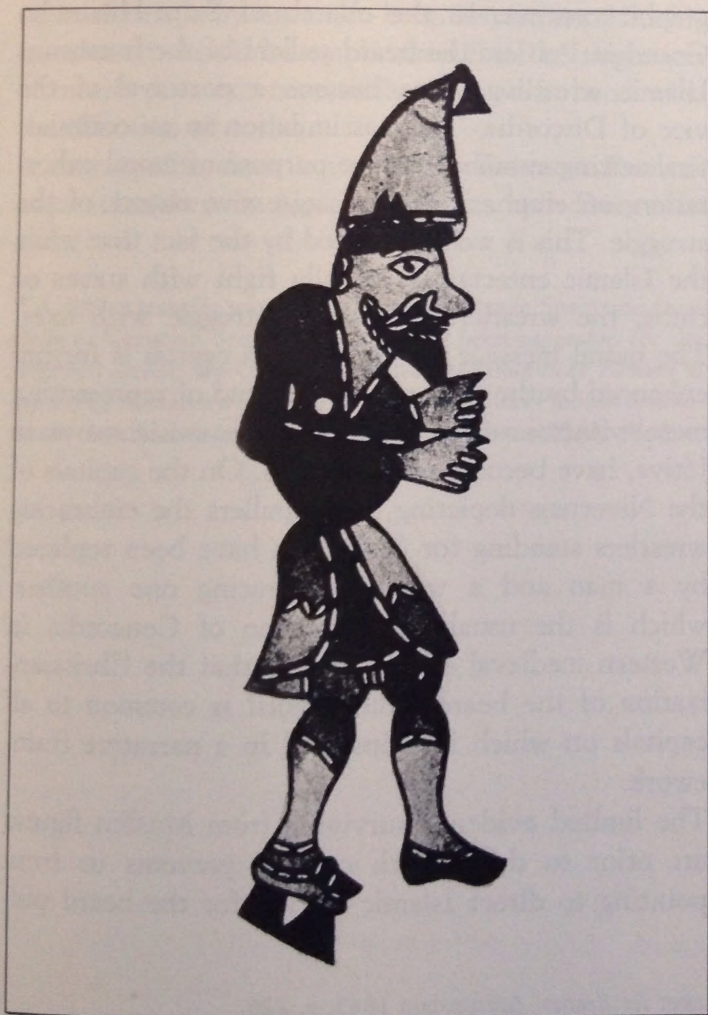
⁶⁸ See ETTINGHAUSEN, *The dance*, p. 218; see also Id., *Early realism in Islamic art*, in *Studi orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida*, I, Roma 1956, pp. 12-15, 23-24.

tainments in the specific period in which beard pullers appeared in Romanesque sculpture.⁶⁹

The entertainments spreading from eighth and ninth century Iran to other Muslim countries were not limited to refined and professional performances. Both written sources⁷⁰ and visual representations⁷¹ point to the existence of low-class, street entertainers who performed in courts alongside professionals. Shadow-play figures such as the one depicted on the twelfth century luster plate previously mentioned [30] were common in medieval Egypt;⁷² they were and still are popular in Turkey. Some of these figures are represented with a pointed hat, a short pleated skirt open in the middle, a garment similar to that worn by the Muslim entertainers examined above, and a high-heeled shoe [31].⁷³ The beard pullers on the Persian star-tile [29] are clearly related to grotesque performances, as attested by their masks and the wrestling with a club. The similarity between this piece, which belonged to a palace wall decoration illustrating the *Shāhnāma*, and the tenth century

relief at Aght'amar, where the wrestlers seem to be peasants judging by their dress and appearance [27], points to a continuous tradition of popular entertainers performing in courts. This is well illustrated on the Jávita basin, which depicts a rich cycle of lavish entertainment [22-24]. Alongside well-dressed attendants serving drinks appear two groups of wrestlers who seem to be street performers. The headgear of the beard pullers of the first group [23] is apparently of the type worn by clowns who fight with staves and pull beards to the sound of music. The second group of wrestlers [24] consists of a grotesque couple of bald men engaged in a contest of beard pulling.

Beard pullers are not mentioned in the Islamic documents dealing with court entertainers and their salaries. Yet from their visual representations it appears that they presumably belong to the type of 'slapstick' performers who hit each other on the face.⁷⁴ The existence of this type of popular performers in Muslim Spain is illustrated by the Játiva basin. Christians living in Muslim Spain undoubtedly enjoyed popular performances in the streets, if not in court. This may explain the inclusion of such scenes in the Beatus Apocalypse, both in that of Saint-Sever [20], where we encounter beard pullers accompanied by an inscription, and in the one from Silos [21], where a musician accompanies a knife dancer, both wearing the short pleated skirt and high-heeled shoes



31. A performer in the Karagös plays.

⁶⁹ This also holds true in the sphere of beard pulling as an expression of sheer aggression. Thus, in an illuminated manuscript presumably executed in Baghdad at the end of the sixteenth century, a miniature depicts two groups engaged in an ideological dispute, a member of one of the parties plucking his rival's beard and expressing thereby his disagreement. This form of humiliation already appears in early Muslim literature: see above, p. 65. - I wish to thank Dr. Rachel Milstein for this reference; see R. MILSTEIN, *Religious painting of the wailing Darvishes*, unpublished doctoral dissertation submitted at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1979, p. IX, pl. 8.

⁷⁰ See J. SADAN, *Humor in Classical Arabic literature*, («Literary Studies and Texts», No. 5), Tel-Aviv University and the Saruji Press, Acre 1984 [in Arabic].

⁷¹ See the late examples in the sixteenth century *Sûrnâme* or *Book of the Feasts* in M.S. İPŞİROĞLU, *Das Bild im Islam. Ein Verbot und seine Folgen*, Wien-München 1971, pp. 151-157, figs. 113-123.

⁷² See ETTINGHAUSEN, *The dance*, p. 218.

⁷³ H. RITTER, *Karagös. Türkische Schattenspiele. Zweite Folge*, Istanbul 1941, fig. 66; M. AND, *A history of theatre and popular entertainment in Turkey*, Ankara 1963-1964, p. 27, fig. 25.

⁷⁴ See SADAN, *Humor*, pp. 42, 58.

common to such performers. No Spanish manuscript depicting beard pullers has survived. Yet, in view of the similarity of wrestling scenes and dress depicted on the Muslim Játiva basin and the Saint-Sever Beatus, it appears likely that Mozarabic manuscripts served in this respect as intermediaries between Muslim Spain and Southern France.

It is now time to return to the depiction of beard pullers in Romanesque sculpture. The Saint-Sever miniature leads us to the first example, that of the Poitiers capital [2]. In his study of the painting and sculpture of Southern France Meyer Schapiro has demonstrated the close relationship existing between the Saint-Sever Beatus and contemporary illuminations executed in the regions of Limoges and Poitiers. He has also pointed to the eleventh century political background that may explain this artistic kinship between Saint-Sever in Gascony and Poitiers: during the rule of Abbot Gregory, under whom the Saint-Sever Beatus was copied, Gascony was ruled by the Counts of Poitiers.⁷⁵ The Saint-Sever miniature, dated 1060, belongs to the same period as the Poitiers capital. Both works share several common features: as mentioned above, among the French capitals only that of Poitiers represents bald beard pullers as in Saint-Sever, and in both cases a female figure stands at their side. However, from additional elements on the Poitiers capital it appears that the Saint-Sever miniature did not serve as a direct model to the Poitiers sculptor. It should be noted that the mask-like faces of the beard pullers of Poitiers recall those of the wrestlers on the Persian star-tile [29].

Several elements proper to the Poitiers capital, in addition to wrestling with beard pulling, also imply a strong kinship with similar scenes in Islamic art. The most significant among them is the short pleated skirt opening in the front, which is common to most scenes of beard pulling portrayed on French Romanesque capitals. This type of dress does not appear in the many depictions of jongleurs in Romanesque sculpture. It is to be found, however, in the Beatus manuscript of Silos and on the capital at Santo Domingo de Silos, as well as on the marble basin at Játiva and on many Islamic metal objects. This pleated garb, called *izār* in Arabic, reached the knees

and was attached to the hips with a large belt.⁷⁶ Worn for centuries by workers and entertainers, it enabled free movement essential for their occupations. Additional elements in the beard pulling scenes may also be ascribed to Islam. The "stick dancing game" or mock combat with shields and a sabre or a stick, such as depicted on the Saint-Pierre-le-Moûtier [6] and Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire [9] capitals, are still practiced in Egypt. They are depicted, as we have seen before, on Islamic metal objects as well as ceramics. It has already been mentioned that the beard pullers in Saint-Pierre-le-Moûtier wear high-heeled shoes like the jongleurs in the Beatus miniature from Silos; in Poitiers each of the embracing men has one wooden leg. Contests and mock battles between such figures as well as between cripples were common to the West and to Islam. However, their appearance jointly with beard pullers seems to imply that in our context they originated in Islam.⁷⁷

Although mainly borrowed from entertainment scenes, the beard pullers motif dramatically altered its meaning after being inserted in a Christian iconographic context. In the church of Saint-Hilaire-le-Grand at Poitiers the beard pullers of the humorous Islamic wrestling scene became a portrayal of the vice of Discordia. Their assimilation in an ecclesiastical setting entailed, for the purpose of moral exhortation, an emphasis on the aggressive nature of the struggle. This is well illustrated by the fact that while the Islamic entertainers usually fight with staves or clubs, the wrestlers of Poitiers struggle with axes. The moral message on the Poitiers capital is further enhanced by the women who, instead of representing mere witnesses as in Saint-Sever or musicians as in Játiva, have become peace-makers. On the capitals of the Nivernais depicting beard pullers the embracing wrestlers standing for Concordia have been replaced by a man and a woman embracing one another, which is the usual representation of Concordia in Western medieval art. It follows that the Christianization of the beard pullers motif is common to all capitals on which it is inserted in a narrative framework.

The limited evidence surviving from Muslim figural art prior to the twelfth century prevents us from pointing to direct Islamic models for the beard pul-

⁷⁵ See SCHAPIRO, *Romanesque art*, p. 311 and p. 323, n. 43, in *fine*, and MINER (as above, n. 36), p. 390.

⁷⁶ See R.P.A. DOZY, *Dictionnaire détaillé des noms des vêtements*

chez les Arabes, Amsterdam 1845, p. 226.

⁷⁷ İPŞİROĞLU, *Das Bild*, fig. 123.

lers motif appearing in Romanesque sculpture or from reconstructing a continuous chain of transmission of this motif from its Persian antecedents to the West. Yet in view of the close parallels between Islamic literary and visual themes as well as motifs adduced above, we may attempt what appears to be a plausible reconstruction of the motif's migration from Islamic Persia to the Christian West and of its diffusion within the latter area. A direct borrowing of this motif from Islamic and especially Persian objects brought to the West, as assumed in the case of the ninth century Irish and Carolingian works of art previously mentioned, is not to be excluded. Yet, in view of the meeting of Christian and Islamic societies and cultures in eleventh and twelfth century Spain, the absorption by Christian artists of Islamic motifs, especially those reflecting secular life and entertainment, most likely took place in the Iberian peninsula. From Muslim Spain these motifs migrated to Christian Spain and from there reached France.⁷⁸ In addition to manuscripts and model books, other artistic media, such as Islamic and Mozarabic portable objects, may have also been instrumental in this transfer. It should be emphasized that the migration of motifs does not necessarily go hand in hand with the diffusion of styles.

It may not be sheer coincidence that most Romanesque churches in Northern Spain and France in

which the beard pullers motif is depicted were situated on, or close to the main pilgrimage roads leading to Santiago de Compostella. Artists travelling on these roads may also have contributed to the diffusion of this motif. Scenes of wrestling beard pullers appear among the numerous portrayals of conflict and struggle in Romanesque art, alongside battle scenes as well as confrontations with fierce animals and above all with man's eternal enemy, the Devil. These representations were undoubtedly the reflection of a turbulent society living in a world of hallucinations, haunting visions and everlasting fears. The choice of the aggressive motif of beard pulling was an appropriate expression of the spirit of this age reflected in its extreme in the depictions of Hell in the Last Judgment. It has already been observed that on the whole the Christian West absorbed from Islam only those elements which conformed to its temperament and psychic structure.⁷⁹ Such was the case with the beard pullers motif.

The meeting between East and West has fascinated numerous art historians. It has prompted them to search for evidence illustrating the interaction between these two areas in various periods and in various artistic media. The study of the beard pullers motif constitutes a modest contribution to this too often frustrating quest.

⁷⁸ A similar transfer route from Persia to Islamic Spain and from there to Christian Spain and France has been suggested for the mounted archer: see O.K. WERCKMEISTER, *Islamische Formen in spanischen Miniaturen des 10. Jahrhunderts und das Problem der mozarabischen Buchmalerei*, in *L'Occidente e l'Islam nell'Alto Medio-*

vo, «XII Settimana di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto 1964», Spoleto 1965, II, pp. 948-967.

⁷⁹ See H. GIBB, *The influence of Islamic culture on Medieval Europe*, «Bulletin of the John Rylands Library», XXXVIII (1955-1956), p. 98.